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**New Program Provides Indian Entrepreneurs with Funds to Grow  
Their Business**

(HELENA) – The Montana Department of Commerce has selected a Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa entrepreneur to be the recipient of business development funds from the newly created Montana Indianpreneur Equity Fund.

Michele and Michael Bigback, the owners of Bigback Silk-Screening in Butte will receive \$7,875 in equity funds to grow their business.

“The Montana Indianpreneur Equity Fund is a valuable resource for entrepreneurs who are searching for the funding necessary to propel their business to the next level,” said Governor Brian Schweitzer. “Through this fund, Indian business owners will have the opportunity to achieve their goals and enhance their communities. Each success story will add to the momentum of economic change in Indian Country.”

The Montana Department of Commerce launched the Montana Indianpreneur Equity Fund pilot project in February 2007, as a resource for current or prospective Native American business owners interested in starting or expanding their business. The project was developed by Commerce in cooperation with the State Tribal Economic Development Commission and the Governor’s Office of Economic Development.

“This equity fund helps empower Indianpreneurs who have dreamt of starting a business, but haven’t had access to the equity needed to make their dream a reality,” said Department of Commerce Director Anthony Preite. “The beauty of the Equity Fund is that it is flexible enough to accommodate new and growing businesses and funds will be leveraged with other monies or investment to create the maximum benefit.”

The Bigbacks will use the funds to purchase equipment, expand production and reduce their operation costs. A portion of the funds will be used to establish a line of credit, which will give the Bigbacks the ability to manage larger orders. Bigback Screening also has an Art Gallery, Gift Shop, and Silk Screen Print Shop at 66 West Park Street in uptown Butte. Michael, a Northern Cheyenne Tribal Member and Michele, a member of the Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa, have created a state-wide business network and maintain a close working relationship with all the reservation communities. They are active members of the Montana Indian Business Alliance.

The Department of Commerce and State Tribal Economic Development Commission has made \$70,000 in Indian Country Economic Development (ICED) monies available for the Equity Fund. Equity Funds require a minimum dollar-per-dollar match from outside funds or collateral.

Other recipients include businesses owners from the Blackfeet, Rocky Boys, Flathead, Fort Peck, Northern Cheyenne, and Fort Belknap Indian Reservations.

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